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NEWS RELEASE

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FIFTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT LAUNCHES DRUG COURT

The Fifth Judicial Circuit today launched the Kaua'i Drug Court, a minimum 12-month treatment-based program for 20 offenders. The Hawai'i State Judiciary also has drug courts on O'ahu, Maui, and in Kona and Hilo on the Big Island, as well as a Juvenile Drug Court on O'ahu.

"The Kaua'i Drug Court is an alternative to traditional criminal prosecution," said Alton Amimoto, Kaua'i Drug Court coordinator. "It's designed for eligible drug offenders who want to get off drugs and turn their lives around." Drug court objectives include reducing crime and violence related to illegal drug use, attacking high levels of drug crime on Kaua'i, and relieving the over-burdened court system.

To be eligible for the program, defendants must be at least 18 years old; charged with or pending arrest for a felony drug offense; have no extensive criminal history; and have no prior convictions for sexual or other offenses involving assault. Referrals are made through the prosecutor, the public defender, or a private attorney. The prosecutor must approve referrals before drug court screening. Another way to enter the program is through a probation revocation, where the judge will decide whether the client is approved for drug court.

Drug court clients must make regular appearances before the drug court judge and must participate in treatment, which includes drug testing, individual and group counseling, and attendance at 12-step meetings. "The Kaua'i Drug Court's mission is to address societal problems relating to substance abuse," said Presiding Drug Court Judge Clifford Nakea. "If we provide these drug offenders proper treatment, we can significantly reduce societal and economic costs and protect our community at the same time."

Nationwide, drug courts have proven to be cost efficient and effective. In Hawai'i, treating an adult offender in drug court costs up to \$8,000 yearly, while incarceration costs approximately \$32,000 per year. Each offender in drug court for a year saves the state about \$24,000 and frees jail space for more violent offenders. Drug court graduates are also more likely to return to society as productive, law-abiding citizens, thereby reducing the "revolving door" of arrests.

The Drug Court office is located at 3059 Umi Street, Room 204, in the Fifth Judicial Circuit building, where drug court hearings are held. The Drug Court office can be reached at (808) 246-3368.

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